

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

Claims 1-26 (canceled)

27. (Currently Amended) A stabilizer, comprising:

- a. a bifurcated member having two elongated prongs, each prong having a proximal end and an opposite distal end, said prongs attached to each other adjacent the proximal ends thereof, at least a portion of each prong adapted to engage a heart of a patient and wherein the prongs of said bifurcated member are attached to each other by means of a connecting member, said connecting member having opposed ends in which each end is fixedly attached to one prong adjacent its proximal end;
  - b. an elongated handle segment having a first end and an opposite second end; and
  - c. ~~means for rotatably and pivotally connecting the first end of said handle segment to said bifurcated member, wherein said connecting means allows said bifurcated member to rotate and pivot relative to said handle segment so that said bifurcated member is movable to a desired position;~~ a longitudinally-extending bore within said handle segment;
  - d. a ball disposed within said bore adjacent the first end of said handle segment, a portion of said ball fixedly attached to said bifurcated member, wherein the bore and the ball form a connection that allows said bifurcated member to rotate and pivot relative to said handle segment so that said bifurcated member is movable to a desired position;
  - e. a shaft having an upper end and an opposite lower end such that at least a portion of said shaft is complementarily received within said bore;
  - f. a socket attached to the lower end of the shaft, said socket having an interior surface of a size to complementarily and detachably engage said ball;
- wherein a portion of said bore complementarily engages a portion of said shaft so that the interface therebetween controls the relative movement between said shaft and said bore as said shaft is moved within said bore.

28. (Currently Amended) The stabilizer of Claim 27, wherein ~~said connecting means comprises:~~

- ~~a. — a longitudinally extending bore within said handle segment; and~~
- ~~b. — a ball disposed within said bore adjacent the first end of said handle segment, a portion of said ball fixedly attached to said bifurcated member, said ball is movably secured within said bore so that said ball and attached bifurcated member are rotatably and pivotally movable relative to said handle segment without separating therefrom.~~

29. Canceled.

30. (Currently Amended) The stabilizer of Claim 298,

- ~~a. — a shaft having an upper end and an opposite lower end such that at least a portion of said shaft is complementarily received within said bore;~~
- ~~b. — a socket attached to the lower end of the shaft, said socket having an interior surface of a size to complementarily and detachably engage said ball;~~
- ~~c. — means for adjustably positioning said shaft and attached socket in an engaged position wherein the attached socket is within said bore between an engaged position, in which the interior surface of said socket detachably engages said ball to frictionally hold said ball in the desired position, and a disengaged position, in which the interior surface of said socket and said ball are spaced apart so that said ball is movable.~~

31. Canceled.

32. (Currently Amended) The stabilizer of Claim 340, wherein the portions of said bore and said shaft that engage each other are complementarily threaded surfaces.

33. (Previously Presented) The stabilizer of Claim 32, wherein said bore extends between the first and second ends of said handle segment, said bore having a length, wherein a portion of said shaft extends substantially the length of said bore, and wherein said shaft further

comprises a tightener fixedly attached to the upper end thereof and disposed outside said bore, wherein rotation of said tightener moves said shaft and attached socket longitudinally between the engaged and disengaged positions.

34. (Currently Amended) The stabilizer of Claim 28, wherein said connecting ~~means~~ member further comprises means for removably mounting said bifurcated member to said handle segment.

35. (Previously Presented) The stabilizer of Claim 34, wherein said removable mounting means comprises a portion of said handle segment defining an opening therethrough for allowing said ball to traverse therethrough so that said ball is movable between a occupied position, in which said ball is disposed within said bore, and a withdrawn position, in which said ball is removed from said bore.

36. (Previously Presented) The stabilizer of Claim 35, wherein the opening of said handle segment is disposed intermediate the first and second ends of said handle segment and wherein, when said shaft and attached socket are in the engaged position, said ball is positioned closer to the first end of said handle segment than when said ball traverses through the opening, whereby said ball and attached bifurcated member are prevented from moving to the withdrawn position.

37. Canceled.

38. Canceled.

39. Canceled.

40. Canceled.

41. Canceled.

42. Canceled.

43. Canceled

44. Canceled.

45. Canceled.

46. Canceled.

47. (Currently Amended) The stabilizer of Claim 27, wherein said connecting ~~means~~ member further comprises means for removably mounting said bifurcated member to said handle segment.

48. (Currently Amended) A stabilizer, comprising:

a. a bifurcated member having two elongated prongs, each prong having a proximal end and an opposite distal end, said prongs being attached to each other adjacent the proximal ends thereof, at least a portion of each prong being adapted to engage a heart of a patient;

b. an elongated handle segment having a first end and an opposite second end;

c. a longitudinally-extending bore within said handle segment;

d. a shaft having an upper end and a lower end, at least a portion of said shaft complementarily received within said bore;

e. means for rotatably and pivotally connecting the first end of said handle segment to said bifurcated member, wherein said connecting means allows said bifurcated member to rotate and pivot relative to said handle segment so that said bifurcated member is movable to a desired position; and

f. means for locking said bifurcated member in the desired position wherein a threaded interface between the engaged bore and the shaft controls the relative movement between said shaft and said bore as said shaft is moved within said bore.

49. (Previously Presented) means for removably mounting said bifurcated member to said handle segment.